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SUBJECT: JORDAN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS FALLOUT: IAF AND GOVERNMENT ESCALATE THEIR WAR OF WORDS

REF: A. AMMAN 3241

[¶](#)B. AMMAN 3240
[¶](#)C. AMMAN 1936

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Government - IAF Clash Escalates

[¶](#)11. (SBU) The political clash and war of words pitting Islamists against the Government following municipal elections held on July 31 has intensified. The Islamic Action Front (IAF), Jordan's active and legal Islamist political movement, continued over the weekend its public repudiation of the election process and reiterated its charges that the government grossly interfered (ref B). In a significant escalatory step, IAF Secretary General Zaki Bani Irsheid on August 2 publicly called the elections a "sham" and called on King Abdullah to invalidate the results and "hold accountable" those who were responsible for "falsification of the will of the voters."

[¶](#)12. (U) In multiple media appearances, Bani Irsheid called the election process a "great public scandal" and referred to it as a "shameful" event. He claimed that the IAF was preparing to reveal evidence supporting its allegations of government interference in the election. He also resurrected accusations against the U.S. Ambassador of leading a "provocation scheme against the Islamic movement in Jordan" by urging tribal leaders not to vote for the IAF (ref C) and called the efforts a "Dayton scheme that targets the Islamic movement" (in reference to General Dayton, the U.S. Security Coordinator for the West Bank).

The Government Strikes Back

[¶](#)13. (SBU) The GOJ hit back hard, with Prime Minister Marouf Bakheit, in an August 4 Petra News Agency interview, describing the IAF pull-out as pre-planned. He said that "these people (IAF) were planning to blow up the election process from the inside, in a fashion that reveals an unpatriotic, conspiratorial, opportunistic and anti-democratic mentality." The Prime Minister echoed previous GOJ comments on the IAF withdrawal, calling it illegal and in contravention of Jordanian traditions and norms of political action. The Prime Minister went on to argue that the IAF ploy was a result of shrinking popularity due in part to the IAF's support of similar organizations neighboring Jordan (a clear reference to Hamas) and that the "silent majority has spoken up," in electing pro-government independent candidates during the municipal elections (ref A).

Return of Boycott Threats

¶4. (SBU) Bani Irsheid also threatened to boycott national parliamentary elections due to be held later this year, declaring on Al-Jazeera on August 2 that he doubted that a parliamentary vote would be held, saying that there was no justification for them as the "government will appoint whoever it chooses." The independent, opposition, mass appeal newspaper Al-Arab Al-Yawm reported that at an August 4 meeting of the IAF, called specifically to review the outcome of the elections, a large number of members called on the IAF to boycott the parliamentary elections.

Comment

¶5. (C) The IAF repeatedly threatened to boycott the municipal elections, seeking to bolster its political position and pressure the government against taking measures seen as prejudicial to IAF chances in the polling. Its use of these threats in the lead-up to the parliamentary elections does not come as a surprise (ref C). The call for the palace to annul the results, however, coupled with Bakhit's fiery reaction, is a significant escalation and reflects both sides' continuing efforts to mobilize public opinion and come out ahead in this propaganda war.

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Hale